

September 8, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Vice Chairwoman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
S-146A, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Chairman  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
H-305, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski, Chairman Rogers, and Ranking Member Lowey:

As you work to prepare legislation to fund the government past September 30, we write to strongly oppose the inclusion of ideological policy riders that are harmful to women's health.

Opponents of women's health have long used the appropriations process to undermine women's access to comprehensive reproductive care, including access to safe and legal abortion. We continue to strongly oppose policy riders that deny insurance coverage of abortion for women enrolled in Medicaid, women who work for the federal government, women who live in the District of Columbia, and others, as well as riders that embolden health care entities to refuse to comply with laws that ensure women's access to abortion services.

A number of new anti-women's health policy riders are included in individual FY 2017 appropriations bills passed either by the House Appropriations Committee or the full House. Additionally, passage of a much-needed supplemental funding bill to address the growing Zika crisis was brought to a halt earlier this year in large part due to efforts to include a rider blocking funding for certain reproductive health providers in Puerto Rico that are uniquely positioned to provide critical health care services to women and men on the island. We oppose the poison-pill riders we have seen in House appropriations bills, listed below, and any additional policy riders that would harm women's health.

- **Sweeping new religious refusal language that would allow employers, insurers, and health care providers to deny others access to critical health care services.** The FY 2017 House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) appropriations bill includes language, taken from H.R. 940, the Health Care Conscience Rights Act (HCCRA), that would allow an employer or insurance company to refuse coverage of *any* health care service to which they have an objection and would also limit access to abortion by embedding provisions that would permit a broad range of health care entities to refuse care, information, referral, and coverage related to abortion – including in serious emergency situations.
- **Language blocking the Reproductive Health Non-Discrimination Amendment Act (RHNDAA), a law passed unanimously by the Council of the District of Columbia.** The FY 2017 House Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) appropriations bill includes a provision that would stop implementation of RHNDAA, a local law that protects employees who work in DC from workplace discrimination based on the employees' personal reproductive health care decisions, like using in-vitro fertilization or birth control.
- **A provision that extends existing harmful restrictions on insurance coverage of abortion by banning all multi-state plans under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) from including such coverage.** The FY 2017 House FSGG bill includes a provision that would take away existing health insurance coverage, thereby further restricting a woman's access to safe and legal abortion.
- **Language that restricts access to abortion for women in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention.** The FY 2017 House Homeland Security appropriations bill includes a ban on coverage and provision of abortion services for individuals in ICE custody except in cases of

rape, incest, and a very narrow definition of life endangerment. Furthermore, the language includes a harmful refusal provision, allowing any ICE employee to refuse “to perform or facilitate in any way” any abortion.

- **A sweeping new refusal provision that would allow employers to discriminate against women and LGBT workers.** During floor consideration of the FY 2017 Energy and Water Appropriations bill, the House passed an amendment that sanctions taxpayer-funded discrimination and is the latest attempt to further embed discrimination policies into federal law. This amendment would insert refusal provisions that already exist elsewhere (including in the Civil Rights Act and Americans with Disabilities Act) into the Energy & Water bill. This proposal is part of a longstanding campaign by lawmakers to undermine important protections for women and LGBT individuals.
- **Reinstatement of the global gag rule, also known as the Mexico City Policy, a provision that greatly undermines access to family planning services around the world.** The FY 2017 House State and Foreign Operations (SFOPs) committee passed bill included the global gag rule, which denies overseas organizations U.S. international family planning assistance if they provide information, referrals, or services for legal abortion or advocate for the legalization of abortion in their country, even if these activities are supported solely with non-U.S. funds - a policy that would be unconstitutional if applied in the U.S..
- **Prohibition on U.S. contributions to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).** The FY 2017 House State and Foreign Operations (SFOPs) committee passed bill cut off funding for UNFPA's life-saving maternal and reproductive health services to the poorest communities in more than 150 countries, including those facing Zika, humanitarian crises, and conflict.

Additionally, we strongly oppose efforts to attach language to the Zika supplemental funding bill limiting the types of providers who can provide critical services during a public health emergency. The Zika virus presents a public health emergency that is growing internationally and domestically and the CDC has identified family planning as the primary strategy to reduce pregnancy-related Zika complications. Women's health care providers are an important part of the health care ecosystem, providing critical gynecological care in partnership with other providers, and must be part of the Zika response.

As you and your colleagues make critical decisions about FY 2017 funding bills, we urge you to protect women's health by ensuring that these and any other ideological policy riders are excluded.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Civil Liberties Union

American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Medical Student Association

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals

Better World Campaign

CARE USA

Catholics for Choice

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)

Center for Reproductive Rights

Center for Women Policy Studies

Disciples Justice Action Network

EngenderHealth  
Feminist Majority Foundation  
Global Health Council  
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.  
Ibis Reproductive Health  
Institute for Science and Human Values  
International Women's Health Coalition  
Jewish Women International (JWI)  
John Snow, Inc.  
Marie Stopes International-US  
NARAL Pro-Choice America  
National Abortion Federation  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Family Planning and Reproductive Health  
National Health Law Program  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health  
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund  
National Network of Abortion Funds  
National Partnership for Women & Families  
National Women's Health Network  
National Women's Law Center  
PAI  
Pathfinder International  
People For the American Way  
Physicians for Reproductive Health  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Population Connection Action Fund  
Population Council  
Population Institute  
Religious Institute  
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)  
Sierra Club  
The Reproductive Health Technologies Project  
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society  
Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation  
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity  
World Education, Inc.